

Cumpata: Transportation success stories abound

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It's road construction season! While we sometimes complain about it, it is essential to improve our infrastructure because transportation is a critical component of the economic development process and creating a positive environment for business growth.

When this organization was founded 24 years ago, its sentinel issue was to affect and improve transportation. We are proud our efforts have been successful and this public-private partnership has helped grow the McHenry County economy.

Looking through our rearview mirror, McHenry County Economic Development Corp. has worked without respite to make sure our state and federal legislators and appropriate agencies know transportation funding is a leading issue in McHenry County, and we work together as a team to get things done.

- In the mid-1990s, when the legislature authorized counties to impose a local motor fuel tax of up to 4 cents a gallon, MCEDC led the charge in the successful effort to enact it in two 2 cent increments – 1995 and 1998.
- MCEDC worked with Don Manzullo from the moment he entered Congress in the early 1990s to convince him transportation funding was vital to the area. Manzullo responded repeatedly by securing several rounds of funds for the Algonquin Bypass, the Rakow Road and Route 47 widening through Huntley, and a number of planning projects.
- Our advocacy with Congresswoman Melissa Bean helped secure funding for the Richmond Bypass studies and the Bull Valley Road-Charles Miller Road-River Road-Chapel Hill Road eastern bypass of McHenry.
- MCEDC's outreach to Sens. Dick Durbin and Barack Obama helped obtain the \$10 million for connecting the Algonquin Bypass in a five-lane cross section from the northern terminus to Rakow Road.
- When the Legislature chose to impose an additional RTA sales tax on McHenry County, MCEDC tirelessly worked to see that the local portion was dedicated solely to transportation funding. This local motor fuel tax gave us the opportunity to leverage our funds by issuing bonds to build major projects (such as widening Algonquin Road from Algonquin to Huntley).

Once again, MCEDC took the lead in encouraging this major County Board policy change, which has worked very well.

Where we are today:

- The Algonquin Western Bypass, which recently won the 2015 Public Works Project of Year Award from the American Public Works Association, is open and working.
- MCEDC continues to advocate for the Route 23-Interstate 90 interchange, providing the first interstate access to McHenry County (the largest U.S. county by population without interstate access).

Not only will it be a massive economic driver, but it looks to be incredibly cost effective because the Illinois Tollway embraced the project in the midst of the Interstate 90 reconstruction.

- The Rakow Road widening and the widening of Route 47 from I-90 to Reed Road in Huntley are complete.
- The final phase of the Bull Valley Road-Charles Miller Road-River Road-Chapel Hill Road bypass to Route 120 will finish this year.
- The final phase connecting the north terminus of the Algonquin Western Bypass with a five-lane cross section to the north end of Crystal Lake, which includes the intersection at Routes 31 and 176, will be completed this year.
- The bonds issued leveraging the local motor fuel tax largely have been paid off, so we are in a strong position to do it again to undertake major local projects.
- The full interchange at I-90 and Route 47 was completed on time and under budget, and it has proven even more of a positive economic force for us than we predicted.
- The Route 14 improvements between Crystal Lake and Woodstock are underway.
- MCEDC has advocated for planning projects on Route 31 from Route 176 to Route 120 and Route 47 from the north end of Huntley to north of Woodstock (Reed Road to Charles Road in two projects).
- Regional projects also on our agenda are the Longmeadow Parkway/Bolz Road Bridge in Kane County and Route 53-Route 120 in Lake County.
- MCEDC continues to support long-range thinking and regional planning, such as planning for the extension of the Route 53-Route 120 project into McHenry County to connect to Route 31 north of McHenry with a new bridge over the Fox River and, ultimately, to connect to Route 12 at the Wisconsin state line. We also support Wisconsin projects to improve Route 12 from Elkhorn, Wisconsin, up to Interstate 94, which would create a new regionally important economic corridor affecting Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota.
- MCEDC has been a loud and consistent voice in the need to improve our broadband infrastructure, noting it helps our agriculture sector with GPS for farming, enables virtual commuting and cyber meetings for businesses that can reduce the stress on roadways and transit.

MCEDC started the US-14 fiber optic consortium that is bringing broadband through Crystal Lake and Woodstock, benefiting McHenry County College, school districts, city and county government, businesses and all our citizens.

- MCEDC started the committee that formed McRIDE, to provide far better PACE transit options for citizens who do not have access to a car.
- MCEDC has been a strong advocate for Metra improvements on the UP-Northwest line, including the spur through McHenry to Johnsburg and, ultimately, improvements to the Milwaukee Road line to Fox Lake to extend it to provide service to Spring Grove, Richmond and, perhaps, Hebron and Lake Geneva.
- We are working closely with the Chicago Metropolitan Agency on Planning, the county plan commission on the 2030 plan and the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission.
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